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The assembly at Mashushu – see Editorial



The baptismal service at Mashushu – see Editorial

Front cover picture – *The assembly at Mashushu gathers on the shore of a lake in anticipation of the baptismal service – see Editorial*

Editorial

How churches are born in Africa

In RT 222 Phil Arthur, pastor of the Grace Baptist Church in Lancaster, described his experience of planting a church in Ulverston, Cumbria. Ulverston is forty miles by road from Lancaster. He suggested that readers of *Reformation Today* in other parts of the world might be forcibly struck by the sheer length of time (twelve years) involved in bringing a new church to birth in what is now a highly secularised and spiritually indifferent nation where, sadly, many people have a cynical attitude to the claims of Christ on their lives.

In contrast to that we have the recent experience of Jonathan Holdt, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church, Lyttleton. Lyttleton lies between Pretoria and Johannesburg. This is Jonathan's description received in early June:

‘This past week-end we visited a remote village called Mashushu some 150km east from Polekwane (Pietersburg), 230km north of Pretoria). Last year a team from Bethany Baptist Church together with a pastor from Samaria Mission, Paul Mabane, conducted an outreach in the area of Mashushu where there is no church of any kind. We were the first group of Christians to do any outreach here that we are aware of. The response to the gospel was amazing with many committing their lives to Christ. Arriving on Friday, 23rd May we joined in an evening time of celebration, worship and ministry of God's Word. There was a joyfulness among one hundred or more people (including children) present. Saturday was a big day for the church, called ‘Back to Jesus Baptist Church’. Over thirty people had given their testimony of salvation in Jesus Christ. Now that they were disciples they were baptised. I partook in this baptism service in icy cold waters (May is winter-time in South Africa). The sense of God's presence and the joy which accompanied this baptismal service were wonderfully evident. On Saturday evening another big group gathered, probably exceeding 120, to watch the Jesus film. After it had been shown, I preached again on the power of Jesus over evil spirits from Mark 5:1-20, exhorting the people to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our team left early Sunday morning to make our way back to Pretoria.

This new church deeply moved me. These people live in humble circumstances and yet there is a contentment and joy among them that most middle and upper class people do not possess. The reason for that is clear – they have found the

pearl of great price, namely Jesus Christ, who has taken away their sin and given them peace with God. A young boy came up to me just before we left. His name was Kujo. With a beaming face he told me how he now loved the Lord Jesus and wanted to follow him all the days of his life. He is an orphan, being looked after by his grandmother. In a place where darkness reigned supreme there is now light shining. The people have heard the good news. Many have repented of their sins and given their lives to Christ. One elderly lady, a previous drunkard, is now sober minded and attending the services regularly. The power of the gospel has been unleashed. Needless to say, Satan has also been active to hinder the work.

There has been some concern from certain council members with whom we met on Saturday as to the impact of Christianity on ancestral traditions. A school teacher has attacked the faith of some of the young Christians attending school. No doubt the adversary will attempt to lead many of the younger Christians astray, seeking to bring shame upon the name of Christ. This calls for urgent prayer on our behalf as well as further visits to teach and equip the church with sound doctrine. We will require much more investment in this church, both in terms of helping to lay a new foundation for a church building as well as time and energy in discipling the new believers. May God continue to build his kingdom and glorify the name of Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls.’

Fellowship with the Trinity

Prof Michael Haykin, until recently principal of Toronto Baptist Seminary, but now full-time professor of Church History at Southern Seminary, Louisville, USA, in his book *The God Who Draws Near*¹ opens up the subject of spirituality. He observes that there is an upsurge of interest in the subject of spirituality or spiritual experiences. Many seek experience in LSD or cocaine. What do drug addicts experience? What do Buddhists experience? What do charismatic believers experience? What do High Church Christians experience? These issues highlight the question, What is authentic spiritual experience?

Paul declares that ‘God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given to us’. To be sure that is a spiritual experience. There is only one genuine spiritual experience and that is union and communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

¹ Michael Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near*, EP, 120 pp, 2008

Fellowship with the Trinity

Editor

The notorious British atheist, Richard Dawkins, was interviewed on BBC Radio Four during the first week of May. He scoffed at those who believe in God. Dawkins suggested that belief in God is vapid. It makes no sense to say, 'I believe because I believe.' To Dawkins there is nothing out there to prove God. To him believers are self-deceivers. My response is that I believe in the facts recorded in writing in Scripture. I have fellowship with the apostles who recorded those facts. I have no reason to doubt their testimony that Jesus is the Son of God. The apostles had fellowship (sharing) with the living Christ. As believers we have fellowship with that same Jesus and with his Father who is our Father too (1 John 1:3).

John Owen, the Prince of the English Puritans, wrote a classic with the title *Communion with God*. This has been simplified and produced in a paperback by the Banner of Truth. Crossway books, USA, has published by far the best edition of Owen's classic.¹ The unabridged Crossway edition emphasises vital points made by Owen which undergird the entire subject

The first vital point is that union with the three Persons precedes communion. Without union there can be no communion. I have union with Christ and on that basis I can commune with him. It is on account of my union with the Father that I can have communion with him. This union is fixed and unchangeable and the love that is in God Triune for his people does not change. My experience in communion does vary with highs and lows.

The second vital point is to note the indivisibility of the three Persons of the Godhead. There is always concurrence in the actings of Deity. At no point can a believer have communion with one of the Persons to the exclusion of the others. This is important. Owen emphasises this in his great work on the Holy Spirit: 'It is a saying generally admitted that *Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*' which may be interpreted as, 'There is no such division in the external operations of God that any one of them should be the act of one person, without the concurrence of the others.'²

The third vital basic preliminary is the need to observe how grace is mediated to us. The Father communicates grace by original authority. The Son communicates grace by a purchased treasury. The Spirit communicates grace by immediate efficacy.

Having introduced his subject with these realities Owen proceeds to open up the subject of communion with the Three by taking his readers to the first epistle of John: 'We proclaim to you the eternal life, which we have seen, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete' (1 John 1:2-4).

The word fellowship in Greek is *koinonia* (root *koin*) and means a sharing together / or to share in. This involves receiving and responding. 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19).

The baptismal formula points to union and communion with the three Persons. 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt 28:19). Baptising them 'in the name' denotes a complete union with each of the three persons of the Trinity. Nothing is held back. The unity of the Trinity is expressed inasmuch as 'the name' refers to all three Persons while the use of the definitive 'the' in the Greek text safeguards the distinction of each Person in the Godhead.³

In what sense is fellowship with the Father different from that with the Son? And what is the difference between fellowship with the Holy Spirit and that with the Father and Son?

To this central subject for all Christians we now proceed.

Fellowship with the Father

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus firmly and clearly teaches us that we should relate to the Father as sons and daughters. This infers that we are members together in a spiritual family by adoption. In the ancient world adoption was common. If a nobleman lacked a son and heir he would adopt a son. Octavius who was to become Caesar Augustus was adopted.

Simply stated, 'Adoption is an act of God whereby he makes us members of his family.'⁴ The Shorter Catechism asks: 'What is adoption?' and answers,

‘Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God’ (Question 34). The Greek word translated adoption consists of a combination of two words, *huios* (son) and *thesia* (placing), *huiothesia* the placing of a son. Adoption is relational. Believers relate to the Father as sons and daughters. J I Packer says, ‘The whole Christian life has to be understood in terms of adoption – if you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being a child and having God as his Father.’⁵

The apostle Paul equates leading and assurance with adoption. ‘Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory’ (Rom 8:14-17). And in Galatians we read, ‘In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through Christ Jesus’ (cf. Gal 3:23-26). John Murray says, ‘Adoption, as the term clearly implies, is an act of transfer from an alien family into the family of God himself. This is surely the apex of grace and privilege.’⁶ Sinclair Ferguson helpfully points out, ‘There is no higher self-image that the Christian can have, and no doctrine which will more readily help him enjoy the life of faith.’⁷

These high views of adoption are confirmed by Scripture. ‘How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is’ (1 John 3:1-2). The Authorised Version brings out the emphasis of the word *idou* in the Greek text which means Behold! or Look! ‘Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.’ In the NIV the ‘behold’ is expressed by the exclamation mark. However the NIV correctly brings in the words which follow, namely, *and that is what we are!* (omitted in the AV).

Impossible though it seems, a humble believer is royalty. He has been made a priest and a king (Rev 1:6). People would never call a humble believer ‘your royal highness’ but in fact in heaven God’s children are viewed as royal. Adoption is the believer’s right if it is backed up with the supernatural

evidence of the new birth (John 1:12,13). ‘Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.’ Stephen Charnock noted that adoption gives us the privilege of sons, regeneration the nature of sons.⁸

At the heart of adoption is the love of the Father. ‘How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God’ (1 John 3:1). Octavius Winslow suggests: ‘If one perfection of God shines brighter in redemption than any other, it is this. Love is the focus of all the rest, the golden thread that binds them all together in holy and beautiful cohesion. Love was the moving, controlling attribute of God’s great expedient of saving sinners. Justice may have demanded it, holiness may have required it, wisdom may have planned it, and power may have executed it but love originated the whole, and was the moving cause in the heart of God.’⁹

Psalm 103 is a beautiful expression of the believer’s relationship to God as a child captured well in the rendering in the hymn book PRAISE!

Praise the LORD! For, like a father,
Well he knows how we are made:
Frail as grass or meadow flowers,
Quick to grow and quick to fade;
But his grace from time eternal
Rests on those who fear his name,
And to all who keep his covenant
He is evermore the same.

Adoption is described in Isaiah 56:3-5. A foreigner who binds himself to the LORD is assured that he is by no means excluded on account of being an alien or foreigner. Likewise the eunuchs were not to derogate themselves for this is what the LORD says: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant – to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.’

If we live in fellowship with our heavenly Father this will be reflected in the way we maintain unity and love with our brothers and sisters in God’s family the Church. The apostle John majors on the application of adoption in his first letter. ‘Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us' (1 John 4:7-12).

Fellowship with the Son

We relate to and have communion with Christ on the basis of union with him. At every baptism service when a believer is immersed and raised up again out of the water the congregation is reminded of union with Christ. This is a union with him in his death, burial and resurrection. Every time we partake of the bread and the wine at the Lord's Supper we do so in union and communion with Christ. The bread tells of his body broken for us and the wine of his blood shed for us. Believers are one with Christ in his flesh and blood as Jesus said, 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day' (John 6:54). This emphasises our union with Christ's humanity, which is essential for salvation.

Several analogies are expressed in Scripture to illustrate union with Christ. Paul uses the analogy of the human body. Christ is the head and we are the members of his body (1 Cor 12:12-27). The analogy of a building is used in which the stones are depicted as living stones fitly framed together (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-6).

The English Puritan Edward Pearse wrote a thesis with the apt title *The Best Match or the Soul's Espousal to Christ*¹⁰ in which book he opens up the analogy of marriage as used in Scripture to express our union with Christ. Husbands are exhorted to love their wives as Christ loves and cares for his Church. 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies'¹¹ (Eph 5:25-28).

Here is the reasoning followed by Pearse:

Firstly this marriage relation between Christ and believers carries in it a free and cordial (happy) donation, that is a giving of themselves to each other in love. 'I will be yours,' says he to my soul, 'yours to love you, to save you, to make you happy in me, and with me. I, with all my riches and treasures, will be fully and forever yours.'

Secondly this marriage between Christ and believers carries in it a near and intimate union. 'The whole person of the believer is united to Christ; not his soul only without his body, nor yet his body only without his soul, but his person, consisting of both soul and body in conjunction. As Christ is the Saviour, so he is the head of the whole person of every believer; for he saves none but those whom he is head unto.' Because Christ is divine 'he is able to save completely those who come to God through him' (Heb 7:25).

Thirdly this marriage between Christ and believers carries in it full and lasting communion. 'From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another' (John 1:16).

Fourthly this marriage relation between Christ and believers carries in it strong and ardent affections. 'In the marriage relation between Christ and believers, there is a very dear and very intimate affection each to the other. Their hearts are indeed knit, and intimately cleave to one another.' Hence Paul's prayer that we might have the power 'to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ' (Eph 3:18).

Fifthly the marriage relation between Christ and believers carries in it a mutual rest and complacency forever. By complacency is meant delight. 'Christ delights in them and rejoices over them' (Isa 62:4; Zeph 3:17).

In Christian marriage the bride and bridegroom repeat the words, 'To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.' The better for worse includes trials and tribulations. The apostle Paul experienced trials and tribulations in the extreme. In these he was nurtured by his spiritual marriage to Christ as we see from his words, 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead' (Phil 3:10-11). What does Paul mean when he says 'becoming like him in his death'? Surely he means to have the character or demeanour of

Christ and be like him in the glory of his godliness. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly' 1 Peter 2:22-23).

When Paul says, 'So, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead,' he is provoking us to think about the race we are running. Of course Paul was absolutely certain about the resurrection as we see from his description of the resurrection in the famous 1 Corinthians chapter 15. But before we get to that resurrection the ship of life may run into violent storms. The verb 'attain to' is in the subjunctive mood, a mood of probability. The struggle is often fierce so we wonder if we will attain the resurrection but the fact is that we will. In the storms of life it is our union with Christ and his love that sustains us and brings us through. This precious union will always ensure our perseverance even through the last battle when we cross the Jordan.

A fitting response in our union and communion with Christ is expressed by Augustus Toplady:¹²

Object of my first desire,
Jesus, crucified for me!
All to happiness aspire:
You alone our joy can be.
You to please, and you to know,
These are my delight below;
You to see, and you to love,
These are my delight above.

And Ralph Wardlaw:¹³

Let thy love my heart inflame,
Keep thy fear before my sight,
Be thy praise my highest aim,
Be thy smile my chief delight

When affliction clouds my sky,
And the wintry tempests blow,
Let thy mercy-beaming eye
Sweetly cheer the night of woe.

Fellowship with the Holy Spirit

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians concludes with the benediction mostly used in the churches, 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit be with you all' (2 Cor 13:14). The question is, How do we experience fellowship with the Holy Spirit?¹⁴ *Koinonia* (fellowship) is sharing, and sharing is receiving and responding.

Basic to fellowship with the Holy Spirit is the fact that he is given to us in the entirety of his person and work. We are all exhorted to 'be filled with the Spirit' (Eph 5:18).¹⁵ The New Testament does not teach a doctrine of subsequence in which we receive the Holy Spirit when we are converted and then in a second experience we receive him at a higher level. Christians are not divided into two classes. All Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and depending on numerous factors they all differ in the measure of their giftedness and experience, but certainly there are not two categories of ordinary saints and super-saints. Given to all believers is the Person of the Holy Spirit as Paraclete (*parakletos* prefix *para*, alongside, *kaleo* to call) – one who is called alongside. In the ancient world the paraclete was thought of as a legal assistant in a court of law. The Holy Spirit is within and alongside every believer to assist, advise and strengthen.

The fellowship with the Holy Spirit can be viewed in four areas, namely, assurance, teaching, prayer and sanctification.¹⁶

Assurance How do we know we are saved? The Holy Spirit assures us in a direct way. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirits that we are God's children (Rom 8:16). 'And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us' (1 John 3:24). 'We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit' (1 John 4:13). The gift of the Holy Spirit to live in the believer is described as the earnest (*arrabon*). That the Holy Spirit lives in us is a pledge or guarantee of what is to come. Assurance is sometimes compared to a mortgage on a house. Every time a payment is made that is a reminder that eventually the house will belong fully to you. This has to do with assurance.

The Holy Spirit is a seal. 'Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit (*arrabon*) guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory' (Eph 1:13,14). John Owen explains sealing as follows, 'The nature of this sealing consists in the imparting of the image or character

of the seal to the thing sealed. This is to seal a thing – to stamp the character of the seal on it. In this sense, the effectual communication of the image of God unto us should be our sealing. The Spirit in believers, really communicating the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, to the soul, seals us. To have this stamp of the Holy Ghost, so as to be an evidence to the soul that it is accepted with God, is to be sealed by the Spirit; taking the metaphor from the nature of sealing (Rev 7:4). And in this sense is our Saviour said to be sealed of God (John 6:27).¹⁷ This teaching is expressed by Paul when he writes to the Corinthians like this, ‘Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit (*arrabona*), guaranteeing what is to come’ (2 Cor 1:21,22).

In communion with the Holy Spirit our response to assurance is to be active as Thomas Brooks states the matter, ‘An assured Christian will put his hand to any work; he will put his shoulder to any burden; he will put his neck in any yoke for Christ; he never thinks that he has done enough, he always thinks that he has done too little; and when he has done all he can, he sits down sighing, “I am but an unprofitable servant.”’¹⁸

Teaching The ability to understand the Bible is a gift of the Holy Spirit which is described as an anointing (*chrisma*). ‘But you have an anointing from the Holy One and all of you know the truth’ (1 John 2:20). ‘As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him’ (1 John 2:27).

The context in which the anointing is described is the context of avoiding heresy which was being purveyed as a higher knowledge by gnostic teachers. ‘The benefit into which Christians are initiated is the eternal gospel, which is itself the true *gnosis*, while the *chrisma*, the means of initiation into it, is the Holy Spirit of truth.’¹⁹

Prayer Our ability to pray comes from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is poured out as the Spirit of grace and supplications (Zech 12:10). Jude exhorts us, ‘Pray in the Holy Spirit’ (Jude 20) and Paul, ‘Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests’ (Eph 6:18). Not only when we are strong but especially when we are weak and afflicted the Holy Spirit enables us to pray. ‘In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes

for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will' (Rom 8:26,27).

'The children of God have two divine intercessors. Christ is their intercessor in the court of heaven [and] the Holy Spirit is their intercessor in the theatre of their own hearts.'²⁰ There are times when burdens are such that the Christian is not able to express them. The burdens are such that they cannot be articulated in language. They are described as groaning. But they are intercession. The Spirit is the author of these intercessions in the language of groaning.

Holiness Without ceasing the Holy Spirit is at work to sanctify believers. He does this both negatively to mortify sin and positively to transform into the likeness of Christ through the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2). A Christian is controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit (Rom 8:9). The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in the believer who is led by the Spirit (Rom 8: 11 and 14). The leading of the Holy Spirit includes guidance but in the context of Romans 8:12-13 there is particular emphasis on mortification of sin. Positively the Christian is being transformed into the likeness of Christ. 'And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:18). This transformation is expressed practically in fruit-bearing. 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit' (Gal 5:22-25).

Application

How far have you progressed in your experience of communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? The Christian can say, 'You are my portion, O LORD' (Ps 119:57; Lam 3:24). What a portion is our Triune God!²¹

If you are not a believer the question for you is, Where do I begin? Repentance from sin and faith in Christ is the answer. Baptism will then highlight your relationship to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as outlined above. Do not be discouraged if this exposition exposes the weakness of your communion with God. Be happy that the Scriptures can guide and encourage you forward.

¹ John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, edited by Kelly M Kapic and Justin Taylor, Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 444 pages. The original work (see John Owen, *Works*, volume two, pp 1-274) has been modernised but is unabridged. Archaic pronouns *thee* and *thou* have been updated and the 'eths' removed, for example *requireth* becomes *requires*. A 32-page itemised summary or outline is provided. This is of great value because it helps the reader to grasp the whole. The book concludes with complete subject and textual indices. Kelly M Kapic's thirty-page introduction is masterly. Kapic is associate professor of Theological Studies at Covenant College. He explains how this book originated in sermons preached by Owen. Kapic who was the principal editor of this edition of Owen's unique work addresses the question of Owen's use of the Song of Songs. Increasingly in our generation the use of the Canticles is rejected as analogous to the marriage of Christ and his Church. In a footnote (p.35), Kapic points to Robert Jenson who has argued that the Song should be read as 'a solicitation of theological allegory', and suggests: 'thus, this conversation is not dead'. J I Packer on Owen's use of the Canticles states that these might best be described as parable rather than allegory. In other words profitable images from the Song can be used and fanciful allegorical interpretations avoided. Edward Pearse (1633-1673) expounds the marital relationship of Christ and his Church in *The Best Match* (Soli Deo Gloria). Pearse expounds his theme without relying on the Song of Songs to express Christ's marriage to the Church.

² John Owen, *Works*, Vol 3, p. 162

³ Michael Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near*, EP, 2007, p.6

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.736

⁵ J I Packer, *Knowing God*, Hodder, p. 181 ff.

⁶ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Banner of Truth paperback, p. 134

⁷ Sinclair Ferguson, *Essays in honour of William Still*, Rutherford House

⁸ John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, EP, 700 pages, hardback .

⁹ Octavius Winslow, *Our God*, Reformation Heritage Books, p.1, 2007

¹⁰ Edward Pearse, *The Best Match*, Soli Deo Gloria, 205 pp hardback, 1994

¹¹ The analogy of marriage is strong in Scripture as we see from such passages as Ezekiel 16, Psalm 45, Hosea 2:19, Isaiah 54:5, John 3:29, 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Revelation 21:1.

¹² PRAISE! Number 738

¹³ Methodist Hymn Book (1933), Number 89

¹⁴ In his book on the Holy Spirit A W Pink (Baker Book House, 1970) has thirty-two chapters, all edifying, but not one of which is specific on fellowship with the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ John Goodwin (1593-1665) wrote an edifying treatise on this text. *Tentmakers*, 497 pages, 2004

¹⁶ Preachers who wish to develop this subject in detail should note that there are two passages which describe our relationship with the Holy Spirit. The first is the Gospel of John chapters 14 to 16, and the second is Romans 8:1-27

¹⁷ John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, Crossway edition, p.380

¹⁸ Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, Banner of Truth, paperback edition, p. 146

¹⁹ John Stott, *Epistles of John*, IVP, p.110

²⁰ John Murray, *Romans*, p. 311

²¹ Thomas Brooks in his exposition of Lamentations 3:24 titled *An Ark for all God's Noahs*, describes God as our portion in twenty-four different ways: present, immense, all-sufficient and so on. *Works* Vol 2

James Hudson Taylor (1832-1905)

part one

Bob Davey

Hudson Taylor's spiritual background and the early years (1832-1853). The makings of a pioneer missionary

No one man was used of God more in the opening of mainland China to the saving gospel of Jesus Christ than James Hudson Taylor. His personal leadership, from the front, established what became the largest and most influential Christian mission in China.

Spiritually Hudson Taylor was the child of the great Methodist Revival of the 18th century in Great Britain. On 1 February 1776 his great-grandfather James Taylor, a stonemason by trade, had come under a great conviction of sin on the morning of his wedding day. He could do nothing but sink to his knees in prayer. He arose only when he had the seal of assurance of sins forgiven in his heart as he yielded himself to Christ. Then to his dismay he realised he was late for the wedding! Afterwards his new wife Betty scolded him for his new-found faith, day after day, until James could endure it no longer. He carried Betty upstairs, knelt by the bed holding her beside him and then poured out his soul to God in audible prayer. His earnestness solemnised Betty and though she would not show it she came under ever increasing conviction of her sinfulness. The next evening as James read the Scriptures and prayed in family worship (just the two of them), Betty's heart was strangely warmed and she entered into peace with God.

It was a wonderful movement of the Spirit of God into which James Taylor and his wife were thus introduced in a remote corner of Yorkshire in the north of England. All over Great Britain and Ireland similar conversions were taking place throughout all classes and backgrounds. Amid much opposition and open persecution the gospel was salting the nation, slowly but surely, by dedicated Christian lives. After setting up a Methodist meeting in their cottage in Barnsley, James himself was pelted with stones and refuse for attempting to preach in the open air. On another occasion two men rubbed a mixture of ground glass and mud into his eyes. Apart from the excruciating pain and danger of permanent blindness it was a full three months before James could resume work. He refused to prosecute the men. In 1786 the Taylors had the joy of giving John Wesley himself the hospitality of their humble home after he had preached in the open air in their town.



The little Methodist Society seems to have grown rapidly after John Wesley's visit and steps were taken to build a chapel on Pinfold Hill, near the busiest part of town. Among the first to be received into fellowship in the new building in 1795 was the family's eldest son, young John Taylor. He was also an artisan, a linen-reed maker for the rapidly expanding linen trade at Barnsley. John married into the family of one of John Wesley's early preachers in 1799. Following the example of Robert Raikes of Gloucester, one member of the Society started a Sunday School for untaught children of the streets. No fewer than six hundred crowded in at the opening, a testimony not only to the need but also the keenness to be taught to read and write, the Bible being the manual. By 1810 a capacious building had been built for this work and also an enlarged chapel for the Society.

John Taylor prospered in business and ensured an education for his four sons. One took up his father's business, another became a minister of the gospel and a third became a stockbroker. As for the youngest, James, who was to become the father of James Hudson Taylor, the divine hand was upon him from an early age. He was quick in mind, an omnivorous reader and methodical in all his habits. Next to the Bible theology became his favourite study. He spent seven years in apprenticeship as an apothecary (part chemist, part doctor) at Rotherham. He became a local preacher at the age of 19, fell in love with the minister's daughter, Amelia Hudson, set up business successfully in Barnsley with his father's help and then married Amelia on 5 April 1831. They continued as Class leaders in the chapel and were privileged to see a large number of young people converted in early 1833 during a period of revival there. Their first-born son James Hudson Taylor was but a babe in arms during this precious time of spiritual harvest, having been born on 21 May 1832. Already James and Amelia had together dedicated their first-born, if a son, to God's service with the prayer for him to be a missionary 'with the great unevangelized land of China in mind'.

How their hearts' desire and prayer were to be answered! The object of their consecrated prayers was not to learn of this dedication until much later in his life. Two brothers were to die in infancy but two sisters, Amelia and Louise, survived.

For the children schooling was to be at home. Their father taught Arithmetic, French and Latin and their mother, a trained governess, taught English, Music and Natural History. It was a happy home.

The children all loved books, especially anything to do with travel and foreign missions. Industry, discipline and perseverance were taught them by happy example. Family worship was conducted by the father regularly after both breakfast and tea. They were taught heart-to-heart fellowship with the Lord also by the happy example of their parents and the habit of regular times of private reading and prayer was instilled at an early age.

Once every quarter year the drawing room above the shop at 21, Cheapside was filled with preachers of the Methodist circuit, invited for tea after circuit business, and how the children loved to hear them talk. Theology, sermons, politics, the Lord's work at home and abroad, all were discussed with much earnestness and intelligence. It made a great impression upon the children, especially little Hudson. Hudson, too, would often go with his father to the various country chapels where he was preaching Sunday by Sunday. It was thus that Hudson witnessed the year 1839 to be a special year of spiritual blessing. It was the centenary year of the birth of the great revival known as the Methodist Revival or the Evangelical Awakening. In this centenary year a religious revival broke out during the communion season at Kilsyth, Scotland,

under the ministry of William C Burns who had only been ordained five months previously. The influence spread as far as Yorkshire and many were converted in the Methodist chapels and this was witnessed by seven-year old Hudson, of whom it was said that often his face glowed with delight when men were blessed and saved. Burns and Taylor were to meet in China and work together for a time. What holy, happy and profound fellowship they were to have, to their mutual benefit and for the advance of the gospel in China!

At the age of 13 Hudson began to work in his father's shop and he became keenly interested in compounding and dispensing medicines and studied hard. When 15 years old he went to get a business training at a Barnsley bank, which proved highly useful to him in his future career. Unfortunately Hudson had to give up after only nine months because of health problems. It also proved disastrous to his spiritual life which fell away under the bad influences of fellow clerks. He stopped praying, doubted God's existence and determined to get rich. This period lasted over a year and caused pain to his family. His mother and Amelia agreed together to pray specifically for Hudson's conversion.

One afternoon in the summer of 1849 Hudson picked up a tract to while away the time. In his own words 'I was struck by the phrase "the finished work of Christ" ... light was flashed into my soul by the Holy Spirit that there was nothing in the world to be done but to fall down on one's knees and accepting this Saviour and his salvation praise him for evermore. Little did I know at the time what was going on in the heart of my dear mother, 70 or 80 miles away! She rose from the dinner table that afternoon with an intense yearning for the conversion of her boy. She went to her room and turned the key in the door, resolved not to leave the spot until her prayers were answered. Hour after hour did that dear mother plead, until at length she was constrained to praise God for that which the Spirit taught her had already been accomplished, the conversion of her only son.' Hudson's sister Amelia, too, had prayed every day, including that day, for his conversion. When Mrs Amelia Hudson returned home a fortnight later, Hudson was the first to greet her at the door and tell her the glad news. 'I know, my boy, I have been rejoicing for a fortnight in the glad tidings you have to tell.' Hudson Taylor remarks, 'It would be strange indeed if I were not a believer in the power of prayer.' It was upon this belief in the power of 'believing prayer' and also in its practice that the future China Inland Mission was built and maintained itself consistently for a century of mission in China. There can be no doubt that when God determines to work through his consecrated servants he can put the desire for a specific prayer into the heart and then the conviction of its definite answer. This is called 'the prayer of faith'. It is in no way related to a mere human wish whipped up into a 'belief' by an undue reliance on 'a promise of God' and which ends in disappointment.

Now became apparent the unspeakable value of years of steady spiritual disciplines in a Christian home and chapel. These foundations now came into their own. Hudson's spiritual growth was rapid and deep, laying the foundations of his life's work. On one occasion, during an afternoon of private prayer, the presence of God became so overwhelmingly real that he stretched himself on the ground, lying there with unspeakable awe and joy in unreserved consecration for service to God. A deep consciousness of acceptance by God took possession of him 'which has never since been effaced'. However, the devil soon after attacked this faith and Hudson was gripped with spiritual agitation over times of painful deadness of soul and disappointment in the struggle with indwelling sin within the heart. He longed for the cleansing, sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

On 2nd December 1849 Hudson wrote to Amelia 'Pray for me, I am seeking entire sanctification. The earnest desire of my heart is that He will sanctify me wholly and make me useful in His cause.' That night, on his knees in prayer, a mighty battle took place in Hudson's soul. Absorbed in his own need the lad was longing for true holiness but the Lord had other things in view as well, the needs of China! The struggle intensified until in a great climax Hudson renounced his all for God. He would go anywhere, do anything, suffer whatever Christ's cause might demand, nothing held back, if only God would deliver him from his burden and answer his cry for a victorious Christian life. 'Never shall I forget the feeling that came over me then. Words can never describe it. I felt I was in the presence of God, entering into covenant with the Almighty. I felt as though I wished to withdraw my promise, but could not. Your prayer is answered; now go for me to China. And from that time the conviction never left me that I was called to China.' In a brief postscript to the letter to Amelia, written in the morning, Hudson wrote, 'Glory to God, my dear Amelia. Christ has said, "Seek and ye shall find" and praise his name, he has revealed himself to me in an overflowing manner. He has cleansed me from all sin, from all my idols. He has given me a new heart. Glory, glory, glory to his ever blessed name! I cannot write for joy. I open my letter to tell you.'

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they will be filled (Matt 5:6).

From that time Hudson was heart and soul committed to preparing himself to go to China. His family were united with him in support. His parents were now beginning to see the answer to their prayers of dedication of their son before he had been born. They told Hudson nothing of this but quietly encouraged him with level-headed counsel. He would need to develop fitness of body as well as mind and soul. Hudson continued to learn the trade of a dispensing chemist. When he went to China he took with him equipment to chemically analyse the Chinese drugs and to make his own photographic plates and process them. He read everything about China he could find and started to

learn the written characters of the language. Also from this time on he used a polyglot Bible with English, Hebrew and Greek together.

The next year, 1850, saw the visit of Charles Gutzlaff to Britain from Hong Kong and the setting up of the Chinese Association, later known as the Chinese Evangelisation Society. This was to promote missionary work in China. In March the magazine called 'The Gleaner in the Missionary Field' was launched to supply news from Dr Gutzlaff's workers in China and other missionary news. Hudson Taylor subscribed from the beginning. This magazine introduced him into a new world of Christian endeavour both on the continent of Europe and in Britain, the developing network of the emerging movement of the Christian Brethren, also known as the Open Plymouth Brethren. From these pages Hudson learned of the work and principles of George Müller of Bristol. Non-sectarian and international in its interests for the gospel, the Brethren movement has had an immense influence in the history of modern missions, thanks to such agencies as the China Inland Mission. The strength of the movement was unshakeable faithfulness to a biblical faith (evangelical) combined with insistence on a living faith for the Christian life, based on conversion and full consecration. Into this mould Hudson Taylor was schooled of God and progressed from strength to strength. Within two years Charles Gutzlaff was dead with much of his work in tatters. But the vision, prayers and faith for the gospel to be carried to all China carried on.

On 21 May 1851, his 19th birthday, Hudson Taylor left home to gain further medical and surgical skills at a medical practice in Hull. He was there for sixteen months and then in London for a year where he studied at the London Hospital, Whitechapel. During this latter period Hudson passed through stern, self-imposed spiritual discipline and training. The foundations of a great pioneer missionary and visionary leader were being laid. Three things in particular show us the man.

1. In close contact with poverty and suffering Hudson Taylor began to give away up to a third of his income, and also practised rigid economy and self-denial as a preparation for the life he would have to live in China. In London

Charles Gutzlaff is referred to in the article on Hudson Taylor. His life and work was described in *Reformation Today* issue 221. Gutzlaff was famous as a missionary explorer in the first half of the nineteenth century. Disguised as a Chinaman Gutzlaff travelled up the coast of China many times. His reports about China were the first to come to the West from a closed China. His intense desire for the conversion of the Chinese to Christ was inspirational for many. His view was that missionaries should adopt Chinese dress and life-style and that an emerging church in China ought to be indigenous from the beginning. In this Gutzlaff was in advance of his time. Hudson Taylor always regarded him as grandfather to the China Inland Mission.

he would walk eight miles a day to and from the hospital rather than pay for public transport. He lived off a diet of brown bread, apples and water.

2. During this period Hudson Taylor set out to prove he could rely on God alone to supply all his needs. His only resource was prayer. Time and again, in small ways and large, Hudson found his needs were met. Only on this basis could Hudson justify his going out to a dark and distant country where the only resource to rely on would be the faithfulness of God in answer to prayer. This indeed was a life of faith.

3. Hudson Taylor fostered a strong spiritual base of fellowship and friendships that lasted a lifetime.

In Hull he joined the meetings of the Plymouth Brethren led by Andrew Jukes and through this connection he was brought into touch with George Müller of Bristol, famous for his large orphanage and mission work supported through prayer and without appeals for funds. On a visit to London to meet Mr Pearse, the secretary of the Chinese Evangelisation Society, Hudson attended the Brook Street meetings at Tottenham and met the Howard family, so influential in the support and development of the China Inland Mission. (As a sixteenth birthday treat for his sister Amelia they went for a day's visit to the Great Exhibition of 1851 being held in London at that time).

In 1853 events moved fast. News of the Taiping (great peace) rebellion in China broke. The rebels had seized Nanjing in March and had proclaimed a new dynasty based on the Ten Commandments. In Europe and America this news caused a sensation. It appeared the door was opening for the gospel, for which so many had prayed for so long. On 4th June Hudson Taylor was asked to go to China without delay under the auspices of the Chinese Evangelisation Society. He sailed 9th September for Shanghai from Liverpool. He was aged 21, the only passenger on a small sailing ship of 470 tons. 'Never shall I forget that day. As we passed through the dock gates and the separation really commenced, never shall I forget the cry of anguish wrung from my mother's heart. It went through me like a knife. I never knew so fully until then what God *so* loved the world meant and I am quite sure my precious mother learned more of the love of God for the perishing world in that one hour than in all her life-time before.'

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The Evangelisation of France in the mid-sixteenth century

By Frederick Hodgson

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Mt 28:19-20).

By 1555 there were many believers in France. They rejoiced in the atoning work of Christ having been justified by faith. They were the fruit of the evangelistic labours of men like Lefèvre d'Étaples, Farel, Roussel, Berthaud and Courault. These men witnessed the conversions of many who after receiving the Word with joy were to become martyrs for their faith that they boldly shared with others. After the Night of the Placards in 1534 many believers chose exile, others were burnt in the fires of persecution, but at the same time conversions multiplied¹. In this torrid time of trial, many believers met together informally in secret but in public they continued to attend the Roman Catholic services. The effects of such understandable compromise were confusion and backsliding. Spiritual progress was inhibited in many ways.

Meanwhile in Geneva congregations having a common biblical confession of faith and practice had been

established². These congregations had pastoral oversight that insisted on godly behaviour. The battle for churches modelled on biblical lines had been costly in Geneva. At times the outcome of this battle had seemed to be in the balance as Calvin and the other pastors fought against the ever present threat from a resurgence of the Roman Catholic faith on the one hand and the demand by others to be free to do whatever they felt like doing.

In some senses the atmosphere in Geneva is reflected in the world of the twenty-first century where believers might find themselves under threat from an intolerant, cruel, persecuting state controlling religion insisting on obedience to its strictures or superstitions. At the same time another threat to the health of the church is from an opposite quarter, demanding that everyone should be free to be themselves or do whatever they feel like regardless of the law of God. Sometimes evangelists and churches are happy as long as there is a stream of people making decisions for Christ or 'saying the sinner's prayer'. The evangelism of France in the sixteenth century was such that those who believed the gospel were directed into a life of obedience to the

Word of Christ. The church-based evangelism of France was modelled upon the church that came into existence in Geneva.

Berthoud describes the struggle in Geneva: 'The years between 1541 and 1555 in Geneva witnessed a spiritual, doctrinal, moral and political struggle to transform a planted church, having the legal constitution of a dressed church, into a disciplined, faithful and obedient body, manifesting publicly the covenant of grace. For this covenant is effectively established by the obedience of a Biblically structured body of Christians to the divinely inspired clauses of the covenant, God's commandments. For the Church will always be the pillar and ground of the Truth.'³

By 1555 Calvin and the other leaders of the church in Geneva saw that the time had come to *concentrate* on the evangelisation of France. (Missionaries such as Philibert Hamelin had been sent to France earlier than 1555⁴. After four years of evangelism, this brave Christian was burnt in Bordeaux in 1557). Their aim was that of establishing *dressed* churches, under the biblical leadership of elders and deacons as exemplified in Geneva. Berthoud distinguished between these *dressed* churches and the numerous existing informal gatherings of believers meeting for prayer and Bible study throughout

France, called *planted* churches. It is relevant to note the apostle Paul's directive to Titus, to 'straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town'.⁵

Revival and Growth of Dressed Churches

It was in 1555 that the first organised (*dressed*) French Reformed church with its consistory of elders and its deacons and discipline was established in Paris. Its pastor was Jean Maçon who was actually one of the members of the congregation that was chosen to preach and dispense the sacraments. The birth of this organised Reformed church, totally distinct, separate and independent of the Roman Catholic Church, having its own pastor, and dispensing sacraments was a landmark in the history of the Reformation in France. Calvin actually discouraged informal congregations from administering the sacraments until they were properly constituted⁶. The Reformed church in Paris and others like it were more capable of faithfully teaching, nourishing and exercising discipline where necessary than the existing *planted* churches. According to Admiral de Coligny, the French Protestant leader, within seven years there were 2150 *dressed* churches in France. These were often small and had to meet in secret. It is to be noted however, that Pierre Viret, companion and friend of Calvin and Farel in Switzerland, and exiled from



The Pont du Gard was built by the Romans to carry water into the city Nesausus (present day Nîmes). This amazing structure, 160 foot high, would be familiar to the 8000 communicants who heard Viret preach in 1561. Nesausus was used to accommodate retired Roman soldiers and the whole region was evangelised by Irenaeus in the second century. Irenaeus was born around 125 in Smyrna where he heard the preaching of Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John.

Lausanne for insisting on church-controlled discipline was preaching to 8000 communicants in Nîmes by 1561.

Berthoud describes the years 1555 - 1562 as being notable for the 'unprecedented explosion both of conversions to the reformed faith and the establishment of formally organised congregations'. It is important to observe that this remarkable revival took place in a country whose autocratic monarchs of the House of Valois were violently opposed to evangelical faith. They saw it as a movement that

undermined their own absolute power.

After the death of Francis I in 1547 his son Henry II reigned in his place. Henry was a weak pleasure seeking monarch and despite the counsel of his father he allowed himself to fall under the power of the dominating, devoted Catholic Montmorency in addition to the Guise brothers, Francis the strong-minded soldier and Charles the crafty cardinal. They all used the seducing influence of Diana of Poitiers, the greedy but attractive mistress of Henry, (who was twenty years younger than she) to further

their aim of destroying the Reformation in France. She was only too glad to oblige their wishes as she was gifted the forfeited estates of the martyred Protestants. In the background was Catherine de Medici, the cruel, calculating wife of Henry. She was prepared to wait her time and spring the trap of the St Bartholomew Massacre in 1572 in which thousands of French Protestants (Huguenots) were butchered in Paris and elsewhere in France.

Henry was intent on destroying not only the evangelical work in France but also the church in Geneva, having been persuaded that this was the source of his troubles. He vainly tried to enlist Philip of Spain into joining a military expedition against Geneva, but without success, as Philip realised that the soldiers of the Swiss cantons were favourably disposed to Geneva and were the most feared in Europe at the time.

It was against this hostile background that revival swept France. Alister McGrath describes how 'Calvin's influence over France had reached major proportions by 1562. There had been an explosion in the growth of Calvinistic congregations and influence; the complete reformation of France seemed a real possibility. Perhaps one third of the nobility had signalled their acceptance of the religious ideas... The Churches had a total membership in excess of two

million out of a population of twenty million.⁷

Wylie described the way some of these churches came into being in areas as widely spread as Brittany and Provence⁸. In the latter there were no fewer than 60 churches by 1560. He described how the persecuted trampled down believers in Meaux were revitalised and reorganised with pastoral oversight. His description of the birth of the influential church at La Rochelle and the imaginative use of drama pointing to the Bible as the source of remedies for the nation's ills is a reminder that God does not always bring about his purposes in the way that we normally expect.

The glorious extent of the God-sent revival in the face of the opposition from the powerful, corrupt, cruel court was portrayed by Wylie in his words, 'Despite the growing rigour of the persecution, the shameful slanders which were propagated against the Reformed, and the hideous deaths inflicted on persons of all ages and both sexes, the numbers of the Protestants and their courage daily increased. It was now seen that scarcely was there a class of French society which did not furnish converts to the Gospel.' He went on to describe how lawyers, academics, ecclesiastics and great nobles 'rallied around the Protestant standard'. Names which were prominent in French history such as Antoine de Bourbon and his brother Prince

Condé and Admiral Gaspard de Coligny were included in the list.

Henry became alarmed and after attending a meeting of his senators and identifying those of them (such as Annas du Bourg) who spoke up for the Reformers took the action of casting them into the Bastille to await their doom. Henry in all his arrogance never saw the day. He perished in 1559 as the result of an accident in a jousting match with the captain of his guard in which he hoped to display his prowess on horseback. His son Francis II succeeded him to be completely dominated by Catherine and the two Guises. The persecution intensified. Wylie quoted Beza's comments, 'Alas, under the reign of this monarch, the rage of Satan broke out beyond all former bounds.'

One of the first acts of the new regime was to strangle and burn the saintly, imprisoned Psalm-singing du Bourg in the Place de Grève. The reign of terror that followed consumed men and women and orphaned children were left roaming the streets begging for food and sustenance. The mob was let loose on anyone behaving in any way that seemed to be in the slightest way disrespectful of the Virgin. The Guises did all they possibly could in maintaining the white-heated fanaticism of the masses.

It was against this background and the tragedy that was to unfurl that the

revival of the mid-sixteenth century took place.

Source of Pastors

As mentioned earlier, between 1555 and 1562 the number of dressed churches in France rose from one to over 2000. Where did all the pastors come from?

Some of these pastors were experienced pastors from French-speaking Switzerland in the areas controlled by the Republic of Berne. These men had insisted on the principle that churches should exercise discipline along the lines established in Geneva. However, the Bernese authorities opposed this and insisted that the discipline of the church should be subject to the civil authorities. This Erastianism was unacceptable to the pastors and they left the employment of the Bernese government. Nearly all of these pastors had been born in France and were living in exile so they had an overwhelming concern for their own people's salvation. This concern overcame the obvious peril that they faced on returning to France.

In 1559 Pierre Viret, the learned Reformer and native of the Swiss canton de Vaud, was also expelled from Lausanne by the Bernese authorities because he believed that the church should exercise its own discipline. This immensely talented Reformer was distinguished for his contribution to Reformed ethics and

apologetics, but was also a popular preacher known and loved for his mild, gentle nature. Beza, who was to succeed Calvin in Geneva said of him, 'None has a more winsome charm when he speaks.' Viret became an itinerant preacher in France, eventually preaching to crowds numbered in thousands, not only in Nîmes but in centres like Paris, Orléans, Avignon, Montauban and Montpellier, going to his rest in 1571. Gillies said of him, 'He did so excel in sweet eloquence that he chained his hearers to his lips.'⁹

The *Venerable Company of Pastors* officially sent 88 pastors to France between 1555 and 1562, despite only having twelve pastors in Geneva, its rural parishes and its academy. It seems that there was an element of secrecy in pastors leaving Geneva for France, however. Berthoud mentions that in 1561 there were 151 individuals despatched to France. Quoting McGrath he wrote, 'Genevan pastors were prone to disappear without warning, subsequently to turn up in remote corners of France. Local Genevan parishes were stripped of their pastors in order to supply the burgeoning demand from French churches.' It was not only Geneva that furnished the needs of France. He wrote, 'Even the city of Lausanne found itself without pastors for a period, as its clergy heeded the call for volunteers to assist in the great work of evangelisation in France.'

The demand for missionaries to go to France was insatiable. Berthoud reported Calvin's letter of 1561 to Bullinger, the Reformer based in Zurich: 'It is unbelievable to see how impetuously our brothers are rushing forward. Pastors are demanded from all parts. This title of pastor is solicited with as much assiduity as the efforts made to obtain benefices in the Roman Church. My door is besieged like that of a king. Vacant posts are fought over as if the reign of Christ had been peaceably established in France... But our resources are exhausted. We are reduced to searching everywhere, even in the artisan's workshop, to find men with some smattering of doctrine and of piety as candidates for the ministry.'¹⁰

The men who were sent into France were not novices with just a 'smattering of doctrine and of piety'. However, before considering the preparation of these 'good soldiers of Christ' it is worth mentioning another group of brave men who went out from Geneva, richly supplied by the expanding printing houses of this gospel-minded city along with others in Lausanne and Neuchâtel. Wylie described how theological students and sometimes pastors, assuming the humble office of colporteurs, carried the printed Bibles and religious books in abundance into France. 'Staff in hand, and pack slung on their back, they pursued their way, summer and winter, by highways and cross-roads, through forests and over marshes,

knocking from door to door, often repulsed, always hazarding their lives, and at times discovered, and dragged to the pile... Their precious wares they deposited at the bottom of their baskets, so that one meeting them in city alley, or country highway, would have taken them for vendors of silks and jewellery.¹¹

Training and Continued Support of Pastors

In 1552 land was purchased for a Reformed academy in Geneva, but this building was not completed until 1559. It was not the first Reformed academy as Viret¹² had founded a Reformed academy in Lausanne in 1537. (He spent much of his time in teaching Theology to students from every part of Europe in his academy.) When he was expelled there were as many as 1000 students enrolled at this academy. Théodore Beza, the principal of the college and the rest of the college staff resigned en bloc and joined the Geneva academy. Beza became Rector of the College in Geneva and wrote to Bullinger in Zurich that by 1564 there were 300 Theology students officially enrolled in the college, along with others who attended the lectures unofficially.

Missionary-martyrs sent to France were required to engage on intensive study during their training¹³. 'Each Calvinist minister was expected to be well equipped for the continuing task of Biblical study and exegesis. Not

only must he be able to read, write and speak classical Latin with skill approaching perfection; he must also master the Hebrew and Greek of the original Bible texts and learn thoroughly Calvin's own painstaking technique of line-by-line exegesis. Only a man with a high degree of linguistic and philological ability could be entrusted with the task of interpreting to less learned and otherwise occupied people the very words of Almighty God.' The missionary candidates were examined on their doctrine and way of life before they were sent from Geneva to France. Candidate missionaries who had not been recognised as pastors previously were also required to expound a passage of Scripture to the *Venerable Company* and had to prove their capacity for public eloquence. They were not accepted in France unless the *Venerable Company of Pastors* had officially accredited them. They were expected to work closely with other pastors in France and continue to be mutually disciplined in doctrine and behaviour by belonging to *classes*, modelled on the *Venerable Company* of pastors in Geneva. Each city was to have its own *classe*, responsible for all the pastoral posts in the city and neighbouring villages. French pastors of that period were not characterised by individualism but were subjected to rigorous discipline and acted together as a body.

Having arrived in France, they and their churches continued to receive

letters of support, encouragement and warning from Geneva. An example of Calvin's letters to churches reads, 'Persecutions are the real battles of Christians, to test the constancy and firmness of their faith... Hold in high esteem the blood of the martyrs shed for a testimony to the truth as dedicated and consecrated to the glory of our God...apply this for your edification so that it may stir you up to follow them.'¹⁴ He wrote very tenderly to those in prison awaiting the stake. Earlier he had written to young missionaries sent from Lausanne and arrested in Lyons before they could begin their work. He wrote, 'We have been, for some days past, in deeper anxiety and sadness than ever. We shall do our duty herein by praying to him that he may glorify himself more and more in your constancy, and that he may by the consolation of his Spirit sweeten and endear all that is bitter to the flesh, and so absorb your spirits in himself, that in contemplating that heavenly crown you may be ready without regret to leave all that belongs to this world. If he has promised to strengthen with patience those who suffer chastisement for their sins, how much less will he be found wanting to those who maintain his quarrel! He who dwells in you is stronger than he who is in the world.'¹⁵

Relationships between Churches in France

The churches in France were not isolationist. It was very quickly

realised that they faced common problems and dangers and churches were able to learn from one another. In 1559 a National Synod was held in Paris. This venue was chosen because the gathering of the large number of ministers and elders would attract less notice in this large city than it would in a smaller city or town. In the event only eleven churches were represented at the synod because of the difficulties of advertising the event and the obvious dangers to those attending. Their Reformed confession of faith consisted of forty articles based upon the Bible as the sole infallible rule of faith and manners (practice).

Additionally a code of discipline was established, also containing forty articles. Authority within the French Church was spread out, but the exercise of that authority was restricted to those to whom Christ had given suitable gifts and who were recognised by members of the churches. It was a tiered system consisting of *Consistory* (parish level), *Colloquy* (district level), *Provincial Synod* and *National Synod*. The *Consistory* ruled over the congregation and consisted of minister, elders and deacons. The minister could be nominated by any of the three higher levels, but could only be ordained if he had preached three times to the congregation concerned and they were satisfied as to his gifts and fitness to office. The congregation elected the elders and deacons.

All the congregations in a district were represented in the *Colloquy* by one pastor and one elder or deacon and this met twice yearly. It was responsible for settling all questions sent to it from the different churches within the district. The *Provincial Synod* met once a year and each church sent one elder along with its pastor. Its role was to deal with questions that originated from the *Colloquy* and were deemed too significant or difficult to be dealt with at that level. The *National Synod* was composed of two pastors and two elders from each of the *Provincial Synods*. This determined all great causes and was the final court of appeal. A pastor attending this synod was chosen to preside, but his role closed when the synod ended. The motto was 'One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brothers'.

In describing the first synod in Paris, Wylie pointed out that the function of synods was to be 'administrative' rather than 'legislative'.¹⁶ The Confession of Faith was settled first being derived from the Bible. The discipline structure followed. It is not the purpose of this article to promote any view of church government, but it is a useful exercise to consider the advantages and disadvantages of one form of government as opposed to another. Sin undermines all arrangements of church government, but it is valuable to be aware of weaknesses that sin can exploit. The sixteenth-century arrangements in France raise important practical

questions on the subjects of calling and training of pastors, missionaries and other church officers. It also prompts us to consider the degree of association and cooperation between different evangelical churches. Perhaps the biggest lesson that we need to learn from these men is their passion that God should be glorified, his elect gathered and his sheep be fed, whatever the cost.

Conflict with State

The gathered elect, fed and nourished in their churches did not just grow in their mental understanding of human corruption and the grace of God in his work of atonement, calling, justification. The sheep were taught the moral and spiritual implications of the gospel as the Word of God was applied to them. Towards the close of his paper, Berthoud, quoting Stanford Reid, writes, 'This reformed preaching was not satisfied at preaching the gospel and then abandoning the Christians to their own resources at the very beginning of their new life. ... Preaching was not only a means to reach the unbeliever and to offer him salvation in Christ, but also a way of shaping the thinking of believers and of educating them in such a way as to enable them to live in society according to the standards of the Word of God. The preachers called them to take an active part in the life of society in order to influence and change it, shaping it according to the will of their Lord

and King. This could go as far as engaging in political and social action. ...They found direct applications to their texts. This did not render them very popular, but at least no one could have any doubts about what they were saying. These preachers thus exercised a powerful influence over the way their audiences lived out and put into practice their Christianity.'

Quoting Susan Schreiner, Berthoud continued to explain that 'the Scriptural doctrines taught by the Reformers implied that the imitation of Christ is not an individualistic, isolating pursuit, but a social ordering of the world, a life of service and love to one's neighbour, re-establishing of justice and a relieving of poverty.' Quoting Stanford Reid again, Berthoud stresses, 'The Reformers desired doctrine to be not a shadowy philosophy, to which one gave a mere mental assent, but an all-controlling belief which was to dominate political, social, economic, artistic and all other spheres of life. The reform of the Church was to be the rebirth of society for the glory of God.'¹⁷

This new society was not the society of the House of Valois and those that surrounded and manipulated the throne. The growth of the Reformed churches in France and the ardour of both leaders and followers were not appreciated by the autocratic corrupt government of the time who were passionate for the extinction of the

movement. Despite all their efforts people continued to embrace the gospel and join the Reformed cause. Initially the government used the existing legal system in their failed attempt to stifle the preaching of the gospel and its implications to those who responded. The Reformers submitted patiently to the government despite its cruel suppression of the truth. However, matters deteriorated.

Berthoud recalled the vivid language of Agrippa d'Aubigné, 'As long as Protestants were put to death under the form of justice, however iniquitous and cruel it may have been, they bared their throats to the dagger and did not resist. But when the public authorities, the magistrates, tiring of the fires (of the stakes), cast the dagger to the people, and the riots and great massacres in France removed the respected forms of justice and had each man put to death by his neighbour ... who could forbid the unfortunate people from meeting brute force with brute force?'¹⁸ Wylie described the violence that followed, starting with the failed attempt of the Prince of Condé to kidnap King Francis II from the control of the Guise brothers and the massacre of a peaceful congregation worshipping in a barn in Vassy in 1562 by a mob. Religious wars followed, but Wylie and Berthoud pointed out that from the outbreak of religious war the blessing of God ceased in the sense that there were no longer multitudes of conversions.¹⁹

Lessons to be Learned

The evangelism of France attempted in the sixteenth century contrasts strongly with so much evangelism of the present day. The evangelists sent to France from Geneva were not satisfied with a simple 'accepting Jesus'. Their church-based evangelism was designed to make disciples whose commitment to Christ was total. The practice of separating the life of the believer into different compartments was simply not an option. Personal faith in Christ exercised in private and public attachment to the Roman Church was not the option given to the converts. It was a costly decision for the pastors to go into the life-threatening furnace of persecution in France and a potentially equally dangerous thing for the believers to join a church which had renounced the powerful Roman Church as an apostate body, particularly as the government of France supported that church. The standard of behaviour expected by the Reformed churches was such that only those who set their hearts on a path of holiness would wish to join. The fact that such churches grew and prospered is a miracle of grace. It was an amazing example of God sent-revival.

It is not unimportant to note the faith that fired these missionary pastors and gave them the courage to go into this dangerous, threatening mission field, to preach the life-giving gospel, to establish churches that insisted on

high standards of behaviour and proclaim doctrines that challenged the nature of French society. They had a deep awareness of the glory of God and were driven to live for his glory, encouraged by his sovereignty. Berthoud quotes the French scholar Benoit (who was not himself a Calvinist), 'The principal concern of the faithful in the exercise of Christian piety is not his salvation, however legitimate this preoccupation may be. Man's salvation is not an end in itself. It is a consequence and has no other purpose but the glory of God. To make of salvation the aim of religion would, for Calvin, simply be another way of putting man in the centre... if we belong to God and to Christ, who has redeemed us, our entire life must be one of obedience.'

Benoit stated that it was the doctrinal convictions of the Reformers that gave the movement its power, 'Besides this principle of the absolute sovereignty of God, Calvin affirms the antithetical principle of man's responsibility. God is the absolute sovereign, the first and supreme cause of everything that occurs; nevertheless man must foresee, man must provide against misfortunes, man must pray, man must act...No one has affirmed the sovereignty of God as firmly as Calvin; no one has affirmed more than he the responsibility of man.' This last statement of Benoit deserves particular attention. The awareness of the glory of God fired the zeal of the

missionary pastors. They were burdened with a desire to proclaim God's sovereign grace, but it would be impossible to escape the conclusion that their mission was directed with great discipline and the churches which were established were churches that insisted on a Bible-based discipline that was applied to the whole of life.

The vision of God's glory drove the French Reformers and enabled the evangelisation of France in the sixteenth century, despite the apparent impossibility of the task. There are parts of the world today, which are just as hard, perhaps harder to evangelise than the ones they faced. The sixteenth-century revival reminds us that with God nothing is impossible but it also challenges us to learn from the courageous, dedicated, submissive disciplined lives of those who were used as instruments of God during the revival.

The political scene in the UK is dominated by a secular agenda appealing to sensual, materialistic desires and Christians are distressed by changes in the law and anxious about where this is leading. Christians in Westminster form a very small minority and it is hard to see how reversals of government policies can come about. During the French revival such a significant proportion of the political élite were converted that they posed a challenge to the political agenda of the day. This tells us that when God is reviving his

people big changes in politics can occur! The grip of secular thinking on the people living in western countries can be broken. Have we got the vision and self-discipline to challenge it? Are we as determined as the French Reformers were that our churches should be alive to the glory of God and the implications of this?

¹ *Costly Reformation in France*, Frederick Hodgson, RT222

² *Churches - Hospitals or Battlegrounds?*, Frederick Hodgson, RT223

³ *John Calvin and the Spread of the Gospel in France*, Jean-Marc Berthoud, *Westminster Conference Papers* 1992

⁴ Hamelin was sent in 1553 to the coastal region beyond Saintonge to organise and instruct believers warning them not to celebrate communion until they be fully constituted as churches. See *The History of Protestantism*, J A Wylie, Cassell Petter Galpin & Co, Vol. 2, page 340.

⁵ Titus 1:5

⁶ *Ibid*, Wylie, page 340

⁷ *Ibid*, Berthoud, as above

⁸ *Ibid*, Wylie, page 527

⁹ *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival*, John Gillies, Banner of Truth, 1981

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Berthoud, page 26

¹¹ *Ibid*, Wylie, page 525

¹² *Pierre Viret: the Apologetics and Ethics of the Reformation*, Jean-Marc Berthoud, 1995 *Westminster Conference Papers*

¹³ *Ibid*, Berthoud, page 27

¹⁴ *Ibid*, Berthoud, page 31

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Wylie, page 341

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Wylie, pages 529-532

¹⁷ *Ibid*, Berthoud, pages 38-43

¹⁸ *Ibid*, page 31

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Wylie, pages 538-574

News

South Africa

Missionary pastor Karl Peterson writes: We are full of gratitude to the Lord for a wonderful second annual African Pastors' Conference for church leaders here in Barberton. Ninety-five pastors, elders, deacons, their wives and other servants of the Lord attended the Evangelical Press Conference May 9 and 10. People attended from around 30 different denominations and nine towns in our area. At this conference our main aim was to emphasize the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God in the church and Christian ministry. Author Wayne Mack taught six sessions on Biblical Counselling and Zambian pastor Choolwe Mwetwa gave very insightful expositions on the theme Marks of Faithful Ministry. The effect of simple expositions from these experienced men of God was very encouraging. Our desire is to reach the African pastors and church leaders in our area with the rich truths of the gospel of grace and their implications for Christian ministry. The response from this conference exceeded our expectations and we give glory to God.

A major purpose of this conference work is to place sound books into the hands of these church leaders. Over \$1,000 in books were carefully and selectively given to participants and another \$1,000 were sold in the bookroom. Thanks to the mission-mindedness of evangelical book publishers in giving us discounts, these men were finally able to afford Bibles, good commentaries, systematic theologies, biographies and books on church ministry. Many cannot afford to have a basic personal library which contains basic and essential tools for

every preacher. Good food, a wonderful venue and African music made us all look forward to next year's conference!

We are now in the throes of preparing for the much larger conference in Nampula, Mozambique at the end of July. Our two main speakers, from Brazil and Zambia, will give expositions through the book of Ephesians. Pray that this will be a life-changing event.

The Netherlands

Since the time of the Reformation when they were severely persecuted, Baptists in the Netherlands have been a small minority and mostly Arminian in doctrine. Reformed Baptists are few. However 33 gathered during April, mostly pastors and elders, some accompanied by their wives. Kees van Kralingen presented two papers, the first on the history and current position of Reformed Baptists and the second on the theological identity of Reformed Baptists. A special song sheet of Psalms and Christian Hymns was prepared. Lydia van Kralingen accompanied the singing on the piano.

A conference sermon was preached by Michael Gorsira. Michael also opened the meeting with an address on the needs in the current evangelical/baptist churches in the Netherlands. Oscar Lohuis spoke clearly on Acts 6:1-6 and the need and priority for the preaching of the Word and prayer. All addresses were very well received. Profitable time was spent in discussion and in sharing and prayer. A wonderful sense of unity developed which augurs well for the future. The doctrines of grace contributed to depth of unity. For some the doctrines are relatively new.

Myanmar and Thailand

Ken Brownell

I flew to Yangon via Bangkok and on January 27-28 spoke at a church leaders' conference held at the Yangon YMCA. It was sponsored by the Yangon Evangelical Free Church. This is a relatively new church planted by a Singaporean. It is the main international church in Yangon. The English service is held in a hotel. Several years ago a Burmese language work was begun in the YMCA called the Upper Room. More recently a youth church called Yangon New Life Church has also been established at the YMCA. The overall pastor is Song Tjoa from Singapore. Operation Mobilisation in Burma is actively involved in the church. There were leaders from all three congregations as well as a number from other churches. The conference went well. I presented six expositions with the title The Big Story - the Story of Redemption in the Bible. This subject was well received.

Song would like to build the conference up next year and to invite more pastors. On the 29th I visited several outreach ministries about 40 miles from Yangon and spoke at the graduation of a school of evangelists. On the 30th I met several pastors and spoke at the meeting of the Yangon City Fellowship, a ministry of YEFC. It is really a life-skills course to which many Buddhists come. It was very impressive to see so many there in the YMCA. On 2nd February I preached at Immanuel Baptist Church (founded by Adoniram Judson and the main Baptist church in the city), Peace Evangel Church (an Assemblies of God congregation in a poor area) and Yangon New Life Church (very lively). When in Burma I heard many speak of the increased interest in the gospel by Buddhists. It is thought that

the repression of the monks last autumn may have shaken the faith of many.

The next day, 3rd February, I flew to Chiang Mai in Thailand. There I joined David Tucker in teaching the 'Barefoot Doctors' at the training centre of Frontier Labourers for Christ. FLC is a mission led by a Burmese, Daniel Kalnin, working in the border areas of Burma, Laos and Thailand. The BFDs are pastors and evangelists from Burma being given a basic medical training that they can use in their ministries in Burma. David and I were not teaching medicine, but the Bible - David took Ephesians and I took Acts. Again the week went very well, There is a lot of potential here for future work. Daniel wants to use the very well-equipped training centre for leadership training in theology and preaching.

China

When pioneer missionary Robert Morrison, the first to translate the Bible into Chinese, arrived in the Far East he was forbidden entry into China. The death penalty was threatened for anyone tampering with the Chinese language. This was a threat Morrison chose to ignore but it was not easy for those who assisted him in translation. Today one publishing house inside China which is accepted by the government has now published 50 million copies of the Bible. 41 million have been for mainland China and the rest have been exported to Chinese people in other countries. The Bible is not on sale in mainstream bookshops in China. Much smuggling of the Bible into China has taken place. This is frowned on by the authorities. The official Olympic website states, 'Each traveller is recommended to take no more than one Bible into China.'



Ken Brownell maintains contact with Burmese pastors including pastor Henry Thetthio of Hakka in the Chin State of Myanmar from whom he received this photo of the newly completed building for Calvary Baptist Church.

J I Packer

The following report is extracted from an article by Douglas Todd in *The Vancouver Sun*, April 26, 2008.

One of the world's most famous evangelical theologians left the Anglican Church of Canada this week because he believes many of its bishops are 'arguably heretical' for adhering to 'poisonous liberalism'. James Packer, whom *Time Magazine* recently named as one of the planet's 25 most influential evangelicals, said he hesitated before using the harsh terms to describe the Anglican bishops, but believed he must do so in the name of truth.

Vancouver-based Packer, who has sold more than four million copies of his many books, said he and 10 other British Columbian Anglican clergy left the national denomination this week to operate under the authority of a South American Anglican archbishop because they felt they were being 'starved out and worn down'.

Oxford-trained Packer was interviewed at a Friday gathering of about 300 members of the breakaway Anglican Network in Canada, which officially welcomed South American Anglican Primate Gregory Venables to Canada as their spiritual leader – against the express wishes of Canada's top Anglican, Primate Fred Hiltz.

Packer, 81, said he can no longer serve under Vancouver-area Bishop Michael Ingham, who in 2002 sanctioned a diocesan vote that eventually permitted the blessing of same-sex couples at eight out of 67 parishes. 'He is a bishop who appears heretical,' Packer said, comparing Ingham to high-profile progressive U.S. Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong and Church of England Bishop Richard Holloway.

Packer is a long-time member of St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church in Vancouver, which in February left the 640,000-member Anglican Church of Canada to join with 14 other

congregations from across the nation to operate under the authority of the South American prelate.

Known for the way he does not sugarcoat his conservative Christian beliefs despite his soft-spoken, gracious demeanour, Packer said the Bible is the 'absolute' authority on divine truth, which clearly describes homosexuality as a grave sin.

Israel

A legal victory for Messianic Jews has been registered in Israel. Israel's democratic character won the day as its Supreme Court ended the two and a half year battle to keep Patrilineal Messianic Jews out of Israel. According to the Jerusalem Institute for Justice, who fought and won the case, 'A landmark decision today [16th April], the Supreme Court of Israel ratified a settlement between twelve Messianic Jewish believers and the State of Israel, which states that being a Messianic Jew does not prevent one from receiving citizenship in Israel under the Law of Return or the Law of Citizenship, if one is a descendant of Jews on one's father's side (and thus not Jewish according to Halacha-Jewish law).'

The twelve Messianic Jews were refused immigration rights on the bogus and still illegal grounds that they 'commit missionary activity'. One of the applicants was told by a clerk at the Ministry of the Interior that because she was a missionary (all Messianic Jews are labelled missionaries whether they preach or not) and that she was 'acting against the interests of the State of Israel and against the Jewish people'.

Calev Myers of the Jerusalem Institute for Justice writes. 'This important victory paves the way for persons who have Jewish ancestry on their fathers' side to

immigrate to Israel freely, whether or not they belong to the Messianic Jewish community. This is yet another battle won in our war to establish equality in Israel for the Messianic Jewish community just like every other legitimate stream of faith within the Jewish world.'

However according to the Law of Return this still means that if both your parents are Jewish and you happen to believe in Jesus you have no right to immigrate to Israel. Ironically, those Messianic Jews who only have Jewish heritage from their fathers' side now have more rights than those Messianic Jews whose parents are both Jewish!

Richard Gibson of *Christian Witness to Israel*.

United Kingdom

Human Fertilisation and Embryology (HFE) Bill

Monday 19th and Tuesday 20th May 2008 will go down as particularly dark days in Britain. Members of Parliament voted for the creation of human-animal embryos for medical research. They voted to keep the present upper time limit for abortions (24 weeks) despite evidence that a foetus feels pain at this age, despite the fact that increasing numbers of babies born earlier than 24 weeks are surviving, and despite the fact that polls indicate that two thirds of doctors and three quarters of women believe the time limit should be lowered. The conservative MP Nadine Dorries who tabled the amendment to reduce the upper limit argued that terminating a pregnancy after 20 weeks is 'barbaric', and that as a former nurse she had witnessed this barbarism first-hand. MPs also voted in favour of allowing 'saviour siblings' to be created (embryos selected during fertility treatment for their potential ability to act



This group is part of a prayer team of 270 involved in prayer and fasting for the country and comes from Hakka in the Chin State of Myanmar.

as tissue donors to seriously ill older siblings). Finally, defying a plethora of evidence proving the importance of the father in a child's upbringing, MPs voted to remove the requirement that fertility clinics consider a child's need for a father. This makes it easier for lesbian couples or single women to access fertility treatment.

MPs defied much popular feeling in voting for the morally reprehensible option in each case. Many people are appalled at the way that abortion is routinely used as a contraceptive method; increasing numbers of women in Britain have had four or more abortions; the number of 12-year old girls who are having abortions is increasing, and one estimate is that 20% of all pregnancies in Britain are terminated with abortion. This bill represented an opportunity for a very limited reform of the abortion law. It is a tragedy that this opportunity was turned down.

The decision to allow the creation of human-animal embryos is a wilful denial of the uniqueness of human life as made in the image of God. It stands as a gesture of defiance against our Creator, a Tower of Babel moment, for which our legislators will be held accountable. The declaration that fathers are 'unnecessary' likewise defies the Creation order. In the New Testament the Greek word translated 'family' is 'patria'. Behind every 'patria' is a 'pater' (father). The notion of 'family', and of 'fatherhood' derives from God (Ephesians 3:14-15). When the family is deliberately redefined to exclude a father, we are going against God's original intent.

We should be deeply grieved at these decisions taken in the Commons. When the prophet Isaiah caught a glimpse of the holiness of God, he did not only condemn the sin of his people, he felt personally convicted and unclean (Isaiah 6:5). We need to be humbled as we consider that we live in a nation where unborn babies

are slaughtered each day, where God's clear design for family life is wilfully set aside, and where the uniqueness of life is rejected. We are a nation ripe for judgement; we can only plead for mercy. Some *Reformation Today* readers make a practice of setting aside a day a month to fast and pray for revival (for example the first Monday of each month). Perhaps you would prayerfully consider joining this 'concert of prayer'. Now, as never before, we recognise the urgent need to plead with God that in his wrath he will remember mercy.

For continuing updates about the progress of the HFE bill, consult the Christian Institute website: www.christian.org.uk

Lovewise

Seeing first-hand the unhappy consequences of permissiveness in the lives of young teenagers in the north-west led Doctors Liz Jones and Chris Richards to set up the charity Lovewise, which offers biblically-based sex and relationship education. They have just produced a DVD course for parents of primary age children which is very strongly recommended, entitled 'Growing up. . . growing wise @ home'. As Christian parents we dare not leave this vital area to non-Christian teachers. This course enables parents to work through God's design for the family with their own children (available for £10. info@lovewise.org.uk tel. 0191 281 3636).

RC Sproul and six day creation

Tas Walker

For many years RC Sproul publicly advocated a non-literal reading of the opening chapters of Genesis. But not any more.

RC Sproul is a well-known evangelical scholar who has authored some 60 books and produced an enormous selection of other resources such as audio tapes and videos. According to Ligonier Ministries, founded by Dr Sproul, he has degrees from Westminster College, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and the Free University of Amsterdam. Further, he has an extensive teaching career at seminaries and colleges, including Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando and Jackson, Mississippi, and Knox Theological Seminary in Ft. Lauderdale.

Recently RC Sproul published a three-volume layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith entitled *Truths We Confess*.

His treatment of creation within the first volume especially caught my attention because he says he has changed his position from what he held for most of his teaching career. He says that he is now a six-day, young-earth creationist.

Creation is vital

Creation is foundational for the Christian church with every major Christian doctrine coming out of the events recorded in the first chapters of Genesis. Among these are: 1) the nature of God, including his power and goodness, 2) the nature of man, created in the image of God but fallen because of his sin, 3) the nature and consequences of sin, 4) the nature of marriage, 5) the origin of death as a penalty for sin, and an enemy, 6) the need for a Saviour to redeem man from sin, 7) the origin and meaning of work and the weekly day of rest, and 8) the relationship between man and the rest of creation, which is now cursed because of sin, 9) and much more. This is why the doctrine of creation is vital, but unfortunately this doctrine is denied today, both outside and *inside* the church.

Reviews

Dynamic Diversity

Bruce Milne,
IVP, 2006, 185pp, pb, £8.99.

At the Carey Conference 2007 Ken Brownell gave a paper on the heterogeneous unit principle showing that, contrary to Church growth ideas, the Church is intended to embrace different races, social groups and cultures. Bruce Milne develops that theme in book-length form. He sets out the theological foundation clearly, showing God's purpose to bring all things under one head - namely Christ. This includes the reconciliation of different tribes, cultures and groups under his lordship. The means for achieving that end is the cross; through reconciliation with God we are also reconciled to one another and so a new humanity is formed. The barriers between different groups are broken down; that is demonstrated especially between Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2, but also between male and female, slave and free (Gal 3:28). We are reminded how Jesus welcomed the little children (contrary to cultural barriers of the age), spoke freely to women, and encouraged the faith of Gentiles. The Great Commission commands us to make disciples of all nations, and the gift of tongues at Pentecost speaks of the universal reach of the gospel. Milne even reminds us that in our worship we are joining together with the angels and the saints who have gone before (Hebrews 12:22-

23) so that in Christ all barriers are demolished, even those between heaven and earth, and across the ages of church history.

The character of our unity is that prayed for by Christ: that we may be one as he is one with the Father. So it is not a unity of conformity but of diversity, just as the One God is three Persons. Of course conformity would be easier to manage; if we could push everyone into the mould of our own cultural expectations that would be simple. But Christian unity is more complex, and more challenging. Throughout the New Testament there are tensions between Jewish and Gentile converts (even from the distribution of food in Acts 6 omitting the Greek widows). The 'weak' are at odds with the 'strong'. But the answer was never to separate into different churches but to 'keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace'.

Milne argues that if ever there was an idea whose time has come it is this. We live in an ethnically diverse world whose members now live side by side with one another. Even more than in Roman times we are truly in a multicultural society. Here the Church should be taking a lead in giving witness to our unity which transcends cultural barriers. We are challenged to consider how we treat believers within our own churches from other backgrounds or who would like us to

'do things differently'. We are challenged to consider our relationship to other local congregations who share our commitment to the gospel. We are challenged about our concern to reach out to different social and ethnic groups who may live around us. And we are challenged to think of how we engage with the international Church. As we come to worship are we conscious of our fellowship with brothers and sisters across the world? Do we have a burden for the gospel of Christ to go to all nations?

This is a very helpful little book, reminding us of a central theme and prompting us to think again.

Black Voices: The shaping of our Christian experience

David Killingray, Joel Edwards, IVP 2007, 170pp, pb.

I received this book hoping it would be an account of black churches in the UK today. It is not that but a brief account of black Christians over the past 250 years. There are short biographical notes on each individual, followed by a record of their own words. The first chapter gives an account of conversion testimonies, then a chapter on preachers, one on protest and politics, evangelism and mission, serving the community, and Christian life. In about one page we have a glimpse into the life and contribution of each individual, and we are reminded that their influence goes further back than we might have thought. While there were black Africans in Britain over the last several hundred years their position was generally one of servitude. However,

by the beginning of the 18th century some had been called as leaders of churches (with largely white membership), and one became rector of Coates, Gloucestershire 1799-1847. Others were missionaries or itinerant preachers. There was a move to send Africans to the UK for education before they returned to Africa as missionaries. This book gives a little insight into a neglected area of church history.

It is complemented by a volume in the NSBT series from IVP, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical theology of race*, J Daniel Hays, 2003. Hays writes from an American perspective, and is very aware of the sensitivity of the issue of race in the Church. He articulates fundamental principles, such as the equality of all people made in the image of God, and the purpose of God to redeem people from every tribe and nation. He clarifies the historical misreading of the curse on Ham, and makes the point that the prohibition on mixed marriages is a spiritual rather than an ethnic issue. However, much of the book is taken up with a careful study of the Old and New Testaments to show that Africans (Cushites) play a much larger part in Scripture than we may have thought. He observes that Israel was ethnically mixed and included Cushites, for example Phinehas was called the 'Negro' or 'Cushite'. Moses married a black woman, a Cushite (Num 12:1). Then Simeon, evidently a leader in the Antioch church in Acts 13, was called 'Niger' or black. So we are reminded not to project our own racial identity and culture upon the biblical text.
Bill James

Editor ERROLL HULSE, 75 Woodhill Road, Leeds LS16 7BZ
Assistant Editor BILL JAMES, 9, Epsom Road, Leamington Spa CV32 7AR
Associate Editors DAVID KINGDON, UK, TOM NETTLES, USA,
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